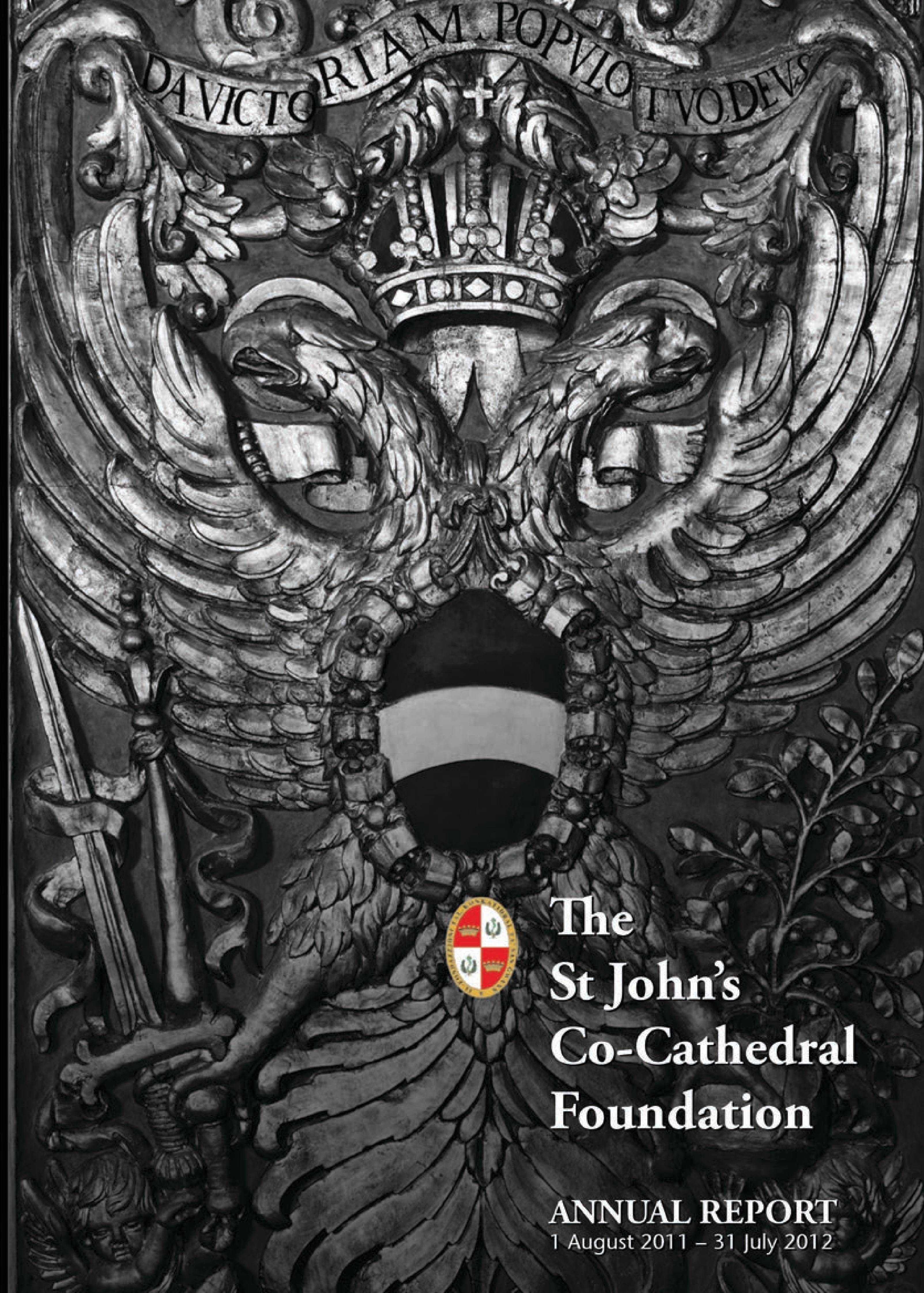
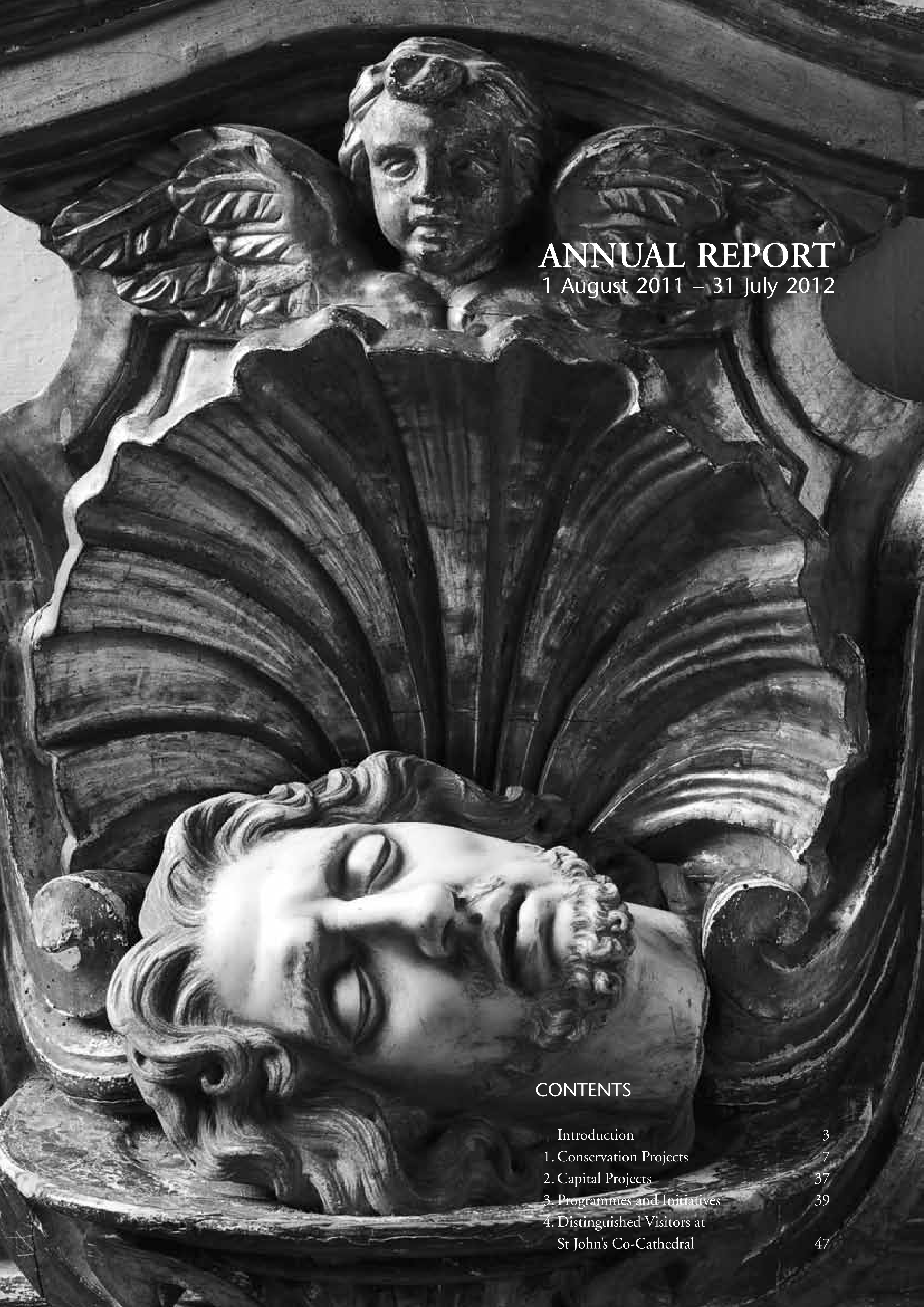


The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT
1 August 2011 – 31 July 2012



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INTRODUCTION

St John's Co-Cathedral was built in the sixteenth century by the Order of the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta to serve as their Conventual church. The Grand Masters and the Knights donated gifts of high artistic value and made enormous contributions to enrich the church with only the best works of art by leading artists of the time. The large number of artefacts by artists, including the renowned Caravaggio and Mattia Preti, that embellish the church are the artistic and religious heritage of hundreds of years of glorious history that is at the same time both Maltese and European. It is a unique monument of international importance and is a gem of baroque art and considered as one of Europe's finest churches. St John's Co-Cathedral is still a very active sanctuary and holy place of veneration. It hosts some of the most important Church celebrations and State events. St John's has become the pride of the Maltese nation and the main attraction for visitors to the island, including very important Church and State personalities on official visits to Malta.







The Knights were noblemen that came from some of the more distinguished families of Europe. After the unprecedented attack on Malta, known as the Great Siege, in 1565, the Knights, as defenders of the Catholic faith, vowed to turn Malta into a fortress that befitted a military Order with a capital city worthy of an illustrious Order of noblemen. Pride of place in the centre of the new city was reserved for their conventual church. The building was completed in 1577 and dedicated to St John the Baptist, the patron saint of the Order. The Order was organised into eight *langues* representing the different regions of Europe and each of the eight *langues* was eventually provided with a chapel within the Co-Cathedral for its particular devotion together with an auberge which each langue inhabited within the city of Valletta.

The simple mannerist architecture of St John's Co-Cathedral is one of military austerity reflecting the sober mood of the Order after the Great Siege. It is an outstanding contrast to its gradual transformation into a glorious baroque interior of rich marbles, monuments, exuberant tapestries, paintings and lavish decorative ensembles that overwhelm the visitor with an impressive but harmonious vision. The interior which consists of a wide nave with a barrel vault and two aisles divided into side chapels was originally equally simple to the exterior. In the seventeenth century, Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner ordered the complete redecoration of the interior. The dawn of the seventeenth century had ushered in the new baroque style and its flamboyant and demonstrative character provided ample decorative material.









The Italian artist Mattia Preti, who was commissioned the embellishment work, transformed the interior into a celebration of baroque art. The contrast between the simple and sober external façade and the festive mood of the interior is a major characteristic that makes St John's such a unique monument. Preti was one of the most outstanding artists of the seventeenth century. Starting with the vault, he depicted episodes from the life of St John the Baptist. With his perfect draughtsmanship and skilful use of colour, Preti produced a masterpiece of dramatic scenes and illusionistic architectural effects. On designs mostly prepared also by Preti the plain walls of the nave and the chapels were carved with elaborate motifs characteristic of baroque ornamentation, transforming the walls into a harmonised though very varied riot of gilded foliage, flowers, angels and other symbols.

St John's Co-Cathedral houses one of the most exceptional marble inlaid floors in the world. This outstanding floor decoration consists of a splendid collection of tombstones that commemorate high ranking Knights. The imaginative designs and the extensive use of symbols and heraldic devices make this floor a unique treasure. Several Latin inscriptions reveal the individual stories of important Knights, their acts of chivalry and religious ardour for which they wished to be remembered.

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation was established in 2001 between the Government and the Catholic Church in Malta. The Foundation is responsible for the administration of St John's Co-Cathedral as a national, religious, architectural, cultural and historic monument. Conservation and restoration of the priceless works of art and artefacts preserved within the Co-Cathedral and its museum are the main priorities of The Foundation. The Foundation utilizes most of the revenue generated throughout the year towards the execution of projects with the aim of keeping this Maltese jewel of international fame in the best possible condition for the admiration of present as well as future generations.

During 2011 and 2012 the Foundation, under the presidency of Mr Paul A. Attard and directed by the Curator Ms Cynthia de Giorgio, continued implementing its large scale holistic plan to restore and conserve the priceless works of art and artefacts preserved in St John's Co-Cathedral and its Museum. A detailed report follows the restoration projects and events carried out during the year under review.



CONSERVATION PROJECTS







Restoration of the Chapel of Castille

The chapel of the Langue of Castille, Leon and Portugal is the first chapel on the south side of the nave of St John's Co-Cathedral, next to the entrance to the Oratory. It was assigned to the Langue by the Chapter General of the Order in 1603. The Langue, had a deep devotion to St James and installed a painting executed by Mattia Preti in the 1660s, dedicated to the saint as its titular. Two lunettes depicting episodes from the life of this saint adorn the walls on either side.

Amongst the benefactors of this chapel was Fra Thomas de Hozes, a Spaniard and Bailiff of Lara, who paid for the carving and gilding works in 1661 and whose marble tombstone is placed within the chapel. During this period the *Prudhommes* of the Conventual church together with the Commissioner of Works commissioned the artisan-sculptors Pietro Burlò and Domenico Gambin to carve the chapel.

The stone walls are beautifully carved with the arms of Castille and Portugal, surmounted with the magisterial crown held by symbolic angels of fame with their trumpets. Angels executed in low relief hold the staff of St James and the gospel and also display the palm of St James Martyr. The passage way leading to the Oratory was carved with shields of the Langue and the scallop shell of St James.

The dome of the chapel, like others within the Co-Cathedral carries the lion of Grand Master La Cassière at its centre, the Grand Master responsible for the foundation of the church. The eight segments of the dome carry the symbols of the Langue. The four pendentives carry escutcheons showing the coat-of-arms of the religion, Grand Master Cotoner, Grand Master Vasconcellos and the Langue of Castille, Leon and Portugal.

In this chapel there are two monuments of notable Grand Masters. The monument of Grand Master Fra Anton Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736) is in the high Baroque style composed of marble and bronze and was executed by the Florentine sculptor Massimiliano de Soldani Benzis. The other monument commemorates Grand Master Fra Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1773) and is in the neo-classical style.

The restoration of the chapel of the Langue of Castille was carried out in 2011. After a call for tenders, the project was awarded to the Maltese firm of restoration ReCoop Ltd. The project consisted of the restoration



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of the dome, pendentives and wall carvings. The gilded carvings were covered with a thick layer of candle soot deposit as well as dust that had accumulated over the years. The dome and walls of the chapel had sustained extensive deterioration due to infiltration of rain water from the roof that had caused considerable losses in the gilding work and the erosion of some of the stone carvings. The lower strata of the walls had partially lost their gilding as a result of rising damp, a problem within the Co-Cathedral. The restoration intervention consisted of the removal of the thick layer of candle soot by using aqueous solutions, whilst hard encrustations were removed with appropriate cleaning solutions. Linseed oil applied during the twentieth century was removed using poultices of alkaline solutions. This was followed by the consolidation of any detachments in the stone carvings and the paint layers using reversible materials. Missing decorative sculptural elements were reconstructed using a lime-based plaster.

Following the conservation of the painted surfaces and gilded carvings, losses in the painted surface were integrated with a water-based paint; the carvings were given a wash of ochre lime-based paint in preparation for the re-gilding process. The dome was gilded following the mordant gilding technique and the wall carvings were prepared with a gypsum ground and gilded using the water gilding technique. Gilding with 24-karat gold leaf was carried out adopting the same gilding process that was used in the seventeenth century.








MDCLXXXI

Restoration of the Chapel of the Langue of Germany







The Chapel of the Langue of Germany, or Allemagne as it was referred to during the time of the Knights, is the first chapel in the north aisle coming into St John's Co-Cathedral through the main door. The chapel underwent a major restoration intervention sponsored by the Federal Foreign Office of the Republic of Germany on the personal initiative of the German Ambassador to Malta, H.E. Dr Hubert Ziegler. The works started in November 2011 and took eight months to complete. Although the chapel of the Langue of Germany required restoration it remained one of the most splendid chapels within St John's Co-Cathedral. The Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Angela Merkel, during a visit to St John's in January 2011, took special interest in the chapel and commented on the overwhelming beauty of the church, stating that this was one of the most impressive monuments in Europe. The project was carried out by *Giuseppe Mantella Restauri Opere D'Arte* following a public call for tender process. The project consisted of the restoration of the entire chapel, that is, the wall carvings, including the altar and reredos, the titular painting and the two lunette paintings.

The chapel was initially assigned to the Langue of England but was reassigned to the Langue of Germany in the Chapter General of 1603 when the Church of England was established. The Knights belonging to this Langue made use of it for their private devotion. The increasing popular trend in the 17th century throughout Catholic Europe to decorate churches in the baroque manner commenced in St John's church during the reign of Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner (1663-1680). The decorative scheme of this chapel is typical of the high Baroque style and was carried out throughout the second half of the 17th century together with the other chapels.

The entire chapel was carved and gilded in 24-karat gold leaf with intricate designs consisting of various types of weapons symbolic of the military role of the Order, angels and a profusion of foliage. The double-headed eagle which was the emblem of the German Langue is a continuous form of ornamentation found throughout the chapel. The decorative embellishments were executed following the bequest of Knight Fra Christian Von Osterhausen, Prior of Dacia, who left 1200 *scudi* in his will in 1664. A further sum was contributed by Fra Francis de Sonnemberg, Prior of Hungary. Amongst the wall carvings on either side of the chapel walls are the coat-of-arms of the members of the Thun family, Fra Franz Sigmund Graf von Thun and the Archbishop and Prince of Salzburg John Ernest von Thun. The coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos y Roccaful (1697-1720)



indicates that further embellishment took place during his reign. The two passageways were also adorned with wall carvings including the coat-of-arms of Baron Fra Wolfgang Philipp von Guttenberg, Bailiff of Brandenburg and of Fra Christian von Osterhausen, both benefactors of the chapel. The decorative designs of the Chapel, as in the rest of the Co-Cathedral, were the work of Mattia Preti who was instrumental in turning the Co-Cathedral into a harmonious high Baroque monument.







The paintings in this chapel date to the late seventeenth century. They are the work of the highly talented Maltese artist Stefano Erardi (1630-1716). The altarpiece depicts the *Adoration of the Magi*, emphasizing the devotion towards The Three Wise Men by the German Knights. The semi-circular paintings in the lunettes above the passageways depict *The Nativity of Christ* and *The Massacre of the Innocent.* The paintings were commissioned in 1667 by Fra Giovanni Ernesto Conte della Torre.

Amongst the several Knights commemorated in this chapel with a marble tombstone are Fra Christian Osterhausen, Fra Wolfgang Philipp Von Guttenberg and Fra Count Franz Sigismund Von Thun.

With the passage of time the chapel had sustained extensive deterioration especially in the dome and walls on account of the infiltration of rain water from the dome that had eroded parts of the carvings and caused considerable loss in the gilding. The lower strata of the walls had partially lost their gilding as a result of rising damp, a significant problem throughout the Co-Cathedral. The gilding layer had also sustained deterioration caused by the thick layer of candle soot deposit and dust that had accumulated over the years.

The restoration project consisted of a study of the various types of deterioration to determine the correct methodology for the restoration process. Samples were taken for scientific analysis in order to identify the manufacturing techniques used in the seventeenth century and other possible restoration interventions. The initial phase of the restoration consisted of removing the large quantities of superficial dust and debris with soft brushes and vacuum suction. Loose sections of the decorative areas were then consolidated using appropriate adhesives.

The next intervention was the removal of loose mortar joints and previous restoration interventions which were unstable and their replacement with appropriate mortar. The carvings and the flat surfaces of the walls that held dirt encrustations were cleaned using various aqueous and cleaning solutions according to the type of deposit. Gilt areas were cleaned with appropriate methods depending on the original manufacturing technique. Linseed oil applied during the twentieth century was removed using poultices of alkaline solutions.



Damaged carvings were reconstructed using a lime based plaster. Lost pictorial areas were integrated using water based pigment. The re-gilding was carried out on the areas that had lost the gilt layer with 24-karat gold leaf using the same techniques employed in the seventeenth century. These consisted of the mordant gilding technique, whereby the stone carvings are prepared with an ochre coloured lime wash to enhance the golden hue of the leaf and affixed with a mordant adhesive. Bole water gilding was applied to the areas where the original gilding was carried out. Preparation consisted of a layer of white plaster followed by the application of bole. The gold lead was applied to the surface with a water and gelatine solution. The restoration of the lost gilding on the walls was carried out in silver leaf according to a restoration intervention carried out in the late nineteenth century. This process consisted of a resinous material applied over the silver leaf to achieve a golden hue.







The three canvas paintings underwent extensive restoration since the chromatic values of the paintings were found to be severely subdued on account of the oxidised varnish that had darkened with the passage of time. The paint and ground layers also showed signs of advanced craquelure tears in the canvas. The darkened oxidised varnish was removed to uncover the original colours and brush strokes employed by the artist. Tears and holes in the original canvas were reconstructed. All three paintings were relined using the glue paste technique (*colla pasta Fiorentina*). New stretchers were constructed to replace the two lunette stretchers that were found to be damaged and could not be reused. The newly relined paintings were stretched onto them. Losses in the paint layer were filled in and pictorial integrations using reversible materials were carried out. The paintings were then varnished and placed back *in situ*.

The final stage consisted of cleaning the marble tombstones with an appropriate detergent and rinsing them with di-ionized water. This was followed by a soft polishing system using fine fish bone extract material specifically designed for this purpose. The floor was then buffered until the desired polished finish was reached. This process was carried out by Mr Jesmond Bartolo, marble restorer with The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation.

The exceptional total outcome of the restoration project was appropriately celebrated during a ceremony held on 25th July 2012 when the Prime Minister, Dr Lawrence Gonzi, and Mr Michael Link, Minister of State at the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as the German Ambassador to Malta H.E. Dr Hubert Ziegler honoured the Foundation with their presence.



The Cappella Ardente







The preservation of the Cappella Ardente was necessary on account of its major historic and artistic importance as it is one of the few ephemeral structures still existing in Malta. The Cappella Ardente is a large wooden structure which served as a catafalque to be constructed in the centre of the church to commemorate the demise of Grand Masters, Popes and important public figures associated with Catholic Sovereigns. It was commissioned by Fra Joseph de Robins de Barbantane to the architect of the Order Knight Romano Carapecchia in 1726 and it was made by Maltese craftsman Michele Camilleri who was the head carpenter of the Order. Made of rich imported woods such as walnut and spruce, it consisted of a base with projecting steps, carved wood features and several spaces for the attachment of escutcheons and inscriptions. The Cappella Ardente base measures approximately 4.62 metres square and it is 10 metres high. It is finished with an elaborate royal crown symbolizing the sovereign status of the Order surmounted with the eight pointed cross. It had fallen into disuse as the customs of funerary ceremonies had changed over the passage of time. Its rapid deterioration was mainly due to insect infestation. Following a conservation assessment report of the several pieces making up this artefact, a call for tenders for its restoration/conservation was issued. The contract was awarded to ReCoop Ltd, a Maltese firm experienced in the restoration of such artefacts, and the major works were carried out by Mr James Saliba, wood conservator.

The project commenced in 2011 with scientific analysis, wood identification and stratigraphic studies. This was followed by acclimatisation, disinfestations, cleaning and structural consolidation. The final stages consisted of the consolidation of the preparatory and pictorial layer, the treatment of any corroded metal, the removal of protective coating, infilling losses and pictorial integration, the application of a new protective coating and the replacement of parts.

The Cappella Ardente was then erected in an exercise to assess the parts for its assembly. The assembly was directed by the architectural firm TBA periti and carried out by constructors from Agius Stone Works. Over 270 bees wax candles were commissioned and installed so as to recreate the original display of the catafalque. The entire catafalque was then displayed in the sacristy of the Co-Cathedral from July till the end of November 2012 to allow visitors to appreciate the artefact and the beauty of its architectural design.


D O M

Restoration of the Grand Masters' Crypt







The Grand Masters' Crypt has undergone an extensive restoration programme on the initiative of The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation. The project commenced in 2006 and was concluded during the year under review. The restoration of the Crypt was a major challenge on account of the several forms of deterioration and the variety of materials making up the artefacts within it. The crypt is a subterranean chamber beneath the Co-Cathedral's high altar which was created at the time when the church was under construction in the late sixteenth century.

It contains the remains of the first twelve Grand Masters who headed the Hospitaller Order of St John between 1522 and 1623. Amongst them are Grand Master Philippe Villiers de L'Isle Adam (1522-1534), who brought the Order to Malta in 1530, and Grand Master Jean de Valette, who was the hero of the Great Siege and also responsible for the initial building of Valletta. Here also lies Grand Master Jean L'Evesque de la Cassière who ordered the construction of the church. The vault of the Crypt, in the later 1720s, was beautifully frescoed by Nicolò Nasoni, an artist from Siena who was also responsible for the illusionistic decorative ceiling of the corridors in the Grand Masters' palace. The Crypt was endowed with numerous Papal privileges to bestow indulgences, a form of spiritual respite from purgatory.

The Crypt had sustained severe deterioration with the passage of time. The advancing deterioration was mainly due to rising damp, fluctuating humidity and temperature levels in the atmosphere. As a consequence the frescoes were covered with salt efflorescence which caused extensive detachment of the plaster support that resulted in the loss of some of the wall paintings. The stone sarcophagi of the Grand Masters also had sustained extensive damage caused by the same conditions which resulted in the powdering of the stone work.

The very demanding restoration project was carried out by The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. The project commenced with scientific investigations and the monitoring of the environmental conditions within the crypt. Both original and non-original materials were studied. Conservation treatment trials followed in order to establish the conservation and restoration interventions required. The restoration project was carried out in four stages. The first stage was completed in the previous years and comprised the consolidation and cleaning of the stone components of the sarcophagi of Grand Masters del Monte, L'Isle Adam, and de Valette, emergency stabilization of the painting on the del Monte tomb, and the cleaning and grouting of the detached plaster of the lower courses of the wall paintings. This stage included the commencement of removing the layers of


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salts and other deposits from the surface of the frescos and the consolidation of the plaster layer.

The second phase of the project commenced in August and continued until October 2010. This phase consisted of the continuation of the work that started in the previous year, including further consolidation of the stone sarcophagi, and the cleaning of the wall paintings and the grouting of detached plaster on the lower parts of the walls. The third phase took place between April and June 2011 and consisted of the consolidation, stone repair and cleaning of the tombs of Grand Masters de Valette, la Cassière and Verdala and the ceiling and lower stratas of the wall paintings in the main chamber. During this phase the removal of the salts that were covering the paintings continued. Unsuitable plaster repairs and re-paintings applied during previous restoration attempts were removed. Grouting was applied to detached areas followed by pictorial integration.







The fourth and fifth stage of the conservation campaign carried out between August and October 2011 and March to April 2012 respectively consisted of the continuation of the treatment of the wall paintings on the ceiling of the main chamber and the walls of the staircase leading to the crypt. The stone altar was also cleaned and consolidated during this phase. The three marble wall monuments, tombs of Grand Masters Martino del Garzes, Luis Mendes de Vasconcelos and Alof de Wignacourt were cleaned using aqueous solutions. Plaster repairs and re-painting applied during previous restoration interventions were removed. Losses in the plaster were restored with a custom made plaster, using river sand of particular granule sizes and colour to attain the desired neutral tone. Grouting was applied to detached areas. Several areas that included decorative elements were integrated using water colours. The tombstones and floor were cleaned from engrained dirt using di-ionised water. The latter process revealed the original yellow hue of the stone that had a considerable impact on the aesthetics of the crypt.

A temporary environmental control system was installed during the project to sustain the required levels of temperature and relative humidity within the crypt in order to mitigate deterioration caused by salts and biological growth that were the primary cause of deterioration within the crypt. Close observation of the whole ambience and related studies continue on a permanent solution.


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Restoration of the Flemish Tapestries







The Foundation's ongoing project of restoring the unique collection of Flemish tapestries will take approximately ten years to complete. The tapestries were woven in pure silk and wool and since textiles are susceptible to deterioration with the passage of time their restoration was necessary in order to preserve them for future generations. Priority was given to the tapestries that were found to be in the worst state of conservation. The project is estimated to cost about €800,000. The restoration is being carried out by the De Wit Laboratories in Belgium.

The collection consisting of 29 tapestries were the gift of the Aragonese Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful to the conventual church of the Order upon his election as Grand Master in 1697. They had cost 40,000 *scudi.* The tapestries arrived at St John's in 1701. The design and compositional arrangements of the tapestries were based on cartoons prepared by Peter Paul Rubens at the Flemish atelier of Judocus de Vos, the court weaver of King Louis XIV of France. The set of 29 tapestries is the largest collection in the world. They were specifically designed to be hung along the main nave of the Co-Cathedral during special festivities and occasions. The 14 large tapestries measuring approximately 6.5 by 6.0 metres depict scenes from the life of Christ and allegories portraying the principal and fundamental divine truths of the Catholic faith. Another 14 smaller panels represent the Virgin Mary, Christ the Saviour and the Apostles. A tapestry portraying the donor, Grand Master Perellos, completes the collection.

Two tapestries depicting 'The Crucifixion' and 'The last Supper' are currently undergoing restoration which is scheduled to be completed in the following year. The restoration process consists of the removal of accumulated dust from the surface which is followed by the application of a fine mist solution of water and solvents until the tapestry is thoroughly cleansed. The tapestry is dried by a special quick drying process to avoid shrinkage. Earlier restoration interventions are then removed, loose parts and threads are consolidated and open seams repaired. The tapestry is then fitted with a new supportive lining to prevent deterioration.

The Foundation was being generously assisted in this restoration project by the Belgian Ambassador in Malta H E Jean-Francois Delahaut and the Belgian Ministry of Defence with the provision of air transport for the transferring of the tapestries to and from Belgium. The restoration itself is completely funded by the Foundation.



Restoration of Main Portal



The restoration of the main portal commenced in September 2011. The project was carried out under the direction of TBA periti. After a call for tenders the project was awarded to Camray Company Ltd.

The restoration included the main stone portal consisting of flat pilasters and two large stone pillars that support the balcony and the large wooden door. The project commenced with a detailed mapping of the various weathering forms that contributed to the deterioration of the stone work. The mapping results showed various forms of deterioration such as extensive flaking and complete detachment in various areas of the paint finish, crust formation, lacunae, staining, fracturing of the plaster and surface deposits. The columns together with their base had been coated with a cement based plaster of considerable thickness.



The method of restoration and materials used in the restoration of the historic fabric consisted of cleaning surfaces with appropriate brush work and pointing with a suitable lime based mortar mix. Repair of the cement plaster using a more appropriate lime plaster was carried out in superficial detachments. Large and severe detachments in the base of the columns were conducted with a micro porous plaster. The stone work was then given several coats of lime wash in keeping with the original finish.



The large wooden door is the original installed in the late sixteenth century; it is a two-leaf door with a fixed panel above. The restoration consisted of removing the several layers of paint using specific mechanical means. Repairs were carried out as necessary using identical timber and appropriate compounds. The wood work was then painted with special weather resistant paint.

During the project to restore the main portal, the two bronze knockers of the main door were also restored. Their author and date of manufacture are unknown. On stylistic grounds and manner of execution they are datable to the main portal of the Co-Cathedral. Each knocker is symmetrically constructed in a pear-shaped form held by three cherubs. The upper part of the knockers is decorated with two intertwined fish tails held together with a rosette-shaped clasp.

The knockers showed signs of deterioration and weathering due to environmental conditions. A deposit of dirt encrustations covered the surface under which lay a fairly stable patina created by the copper alloy's natural process when exposed to the elements. Due to the high relative humidity and chloride concentration present in the atmosphere the knockers showed signs of active corrosion, observed as a light green powdery form. Apart from the latter corrosion, the knockers were covered with a calcareous



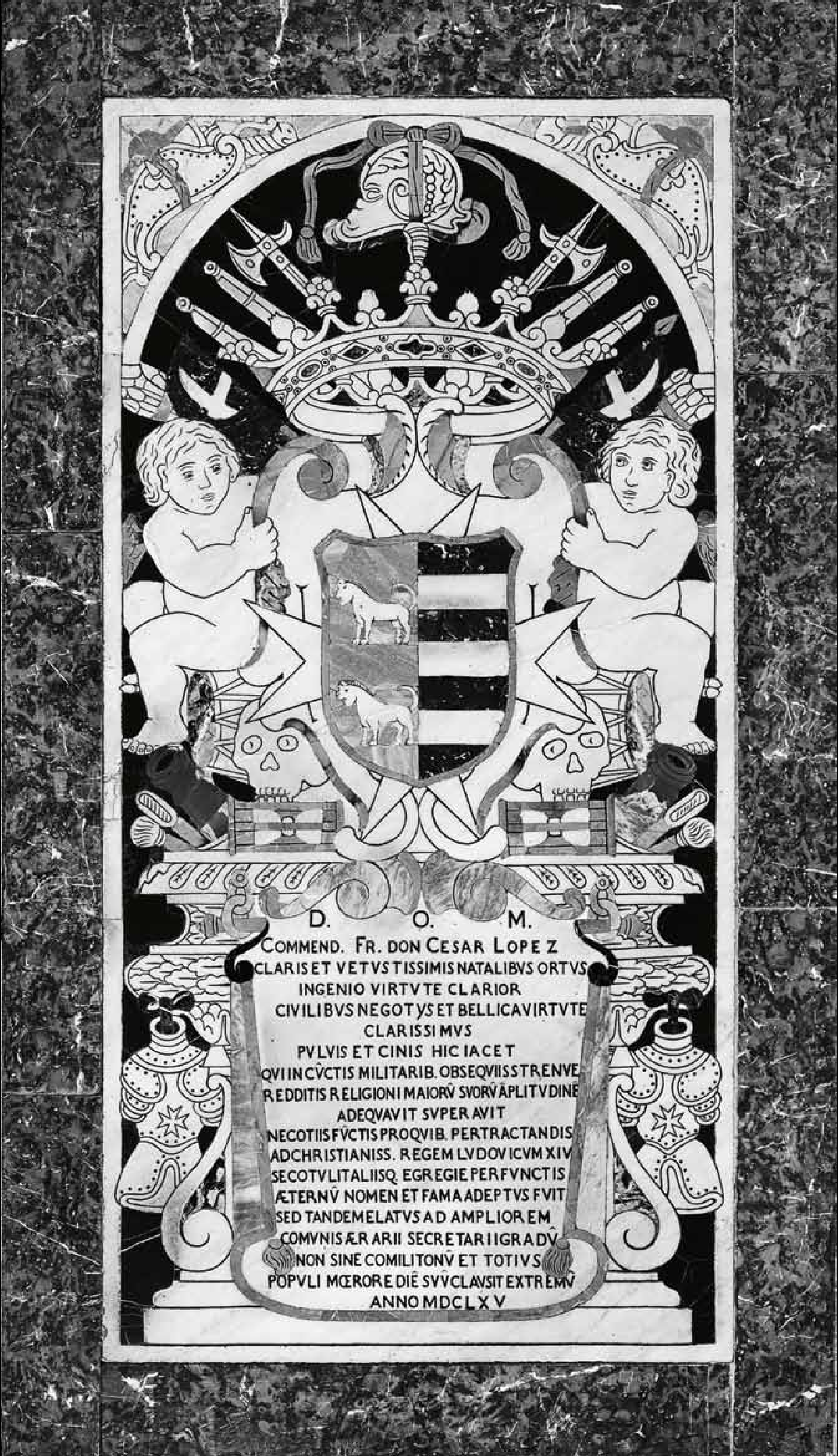
crust. Both knockers also showed signs of previous restorations, such that one of them was repaired internally with bronze brazing for support and infilling. They also carried thick layers of protective coatings of wax and oil.

The door knockers were removed from location and cleaning tests were carried out. The metal elements were mechanically cleaned from the corrosion on their surfaces and given a coating of corrosion converter. Cleaning entailed the degreasing of the bronze from previously applied waxes and oils and the removal of external deposits with mechanical micro-drills with nylon rotary bits. Subsequently an appropriate corrosion inhibition coating was applied to the metal surface to mitigate further corrosion. Finally the door knockers were given a protective coating and reinstalled on the doors.








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COMMEND. FR. DON CESAR LOPEZ
CLARIS ET VETVSTISSIMIS NATALIBVS ORTVS
INGENIO VIRTVTE CLARIOR
CIVILIBVS NEGOTYS ET BELLICA VIRTVTE
CLARISSIMVS
PVLVIS ET CINIS HIC IACET
QVI IN CV̂CTIS MILITARIB. OBSEQVIIS STRENVE
REDDITIS RELIGIONI MAIORV̂ SVORV̂ ĀPLITVDINĒ
ADEQVAVIT SVPERAVIT
NECOTIIS FV̂CTIS PRO QVIB. PERTRACTANDIS
AD CHRISTIANISS. REGEM LVDOVICVM XIV
SECOTVLITALIISQ. EGREGIE PERFVNCTIS
ÆTERNV̂ NOMEN ET FAMA ADEPTVS FVIT
SED TANDEM ELATVS AD AMPLIOREM
COMVNIS ÆRARII SECRETARII GRADV̂
NON SINE COMILITONV̂ ET TOTIVS
POPVLI MŒRORE DIĒ SVV̂ CLAVSIT EXTREMV̂
ANNO MDCLXV

Conservation of the Inlaid marble Tombstones







The Foundation has an on-going programme to restore and conserve the unique floor of the Co-Cathedral that is covered with inlaid marble tombstones. The Foundation employs two full-time specialist marble restorers to repair and preserve the tombstones as well as the marble monuments. The nave of the church and the chapels hold over four hundred inlaid marble tombstones dating from the early seventeenth century to the nineteenth century. Though marble is considered to be an enduring material it suffers from damage caused by abrasion and other environmental conditions. The thin marble inlaid designs on the tombstones are also susceptible to cracking with the passage of time as well as weight leading to losses in the inlaid marble layer. The restoration of the inlaid marble tombstones is executed according to a priority conservation management plan.

The tombstones are the resting places of some of the most illustrious Knights of the Order coming from different European regions. The majority of the designs for the marble tombstones were made by renowned artists and were often executed by Maltese craftsmen. They are all original in design and as a result they are truly unique works of art. Each one is made of a large marble slab that is inlaid with polychrome marble and adorned with symbols of virtues, death and immortality, such as eagles, lions, crowns, skeletons, skulls and angels. The delicately engraved Latin epitaphs together with a range of symbols illustrate the life story of the deceased knight as well as his valorous deeds and achievements.

The laborious work involves the skilful consolidation of any loose parts and the replacement of missing pieces. The restoration of the tombstones is an arduous task and is the main occupation of the in-house marble restorer Mr Jesmond Bartolo. The restoration and conservation of this outstanding precious floor consists of replacing the missing inlaid parts with matching marbles, which is often very difficult to obtain locally and has to be obtained from abroad, generally from Italy, with the appropriate techniques. All restoration is fully recorded and documented.

During the year under review the tombstone of Fra Don Cesar Lopez situated in the north facing atrium to the side entrance of the Co-Cathedral underwent extensive restoration. On account of its location, which is immediately at the entrance of the doorway it had gradually cracked in several parts and sustained extensive damage. The tombstone was carefully lifted and transported to the restoration laboratory where it was patiently repaired and restored, a process which lasted ten months. The two halves were fixed back together using fibreglass rods to avoid corrosion and epoxy


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S. AVLARY, MAGN ANTEA CMD. CVIVS VENERABERE
CINERES SI MORES AGNOVERIS ET VIRTVTES: OMNES
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ERGA DEV PROFVSVS IN PAVPERES RELIG. SVÆ AMANTISSIVS
FIDVSQ. MINISTER TANTI VIRI VTEM REVERITA IPSA PROPE
MORS EST DV DISTVLIT VLTRA AN LXXX FATALE ICTVM
VT MAGNIFICVM PALATIVM PRIORI TOLOZANO ET FRATRIB
CAPELLANIS DOMVM AMPLISSIMAM TOLOZÆ ERIGERET
MELIOREM IN COELO RECVPERATVRVS, ET AMPLIOREM
OBIIT MELITÆ ANNO DOMINI 1674
DIE. IO. MENSIS MARTII ÆTATIS SVÆ
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resin. Various missing parts of the decorative scheme were replaced and the tombstone was polished. The inscription was given a new life.

A further six tombstones were restored during the year under review. The tombstones were those of Fra Ludovico Bacci, Fra Fabrizio Maria Visconti, Fra Joseph Marc-Antoine de Robins Barbantane, Fra Pierre d'Albertas de Saint- Mayme, Fra Paule Antoine de Robin de Gravezon all of which are situated in the main nave, and that of Fra Joseph Mottet laid in the entrance to the Oratory.



In order to protect the tombstones from further abrasion caused primarily by visitors that walk through the Co-Cathedral on a daily basis, the tourist route on the Co-Cathedral floor is covered by a specially made long-lasting protective carpet.



Conservation of the Marble Altar - Chapel of the Langue of Castille







The eighteenth century altar of the chapel of the Langue of Castille is composed of an altar table made out of marble carved with delicate decorative motifs. It is surrounded with an imposing marble clad reredos made from particularly fine and rare polychrome marbles. The various types of marble it is composed of include *bianco di Carrara, rosso di Siena, verde antico*, yellow ochre and amber. The altar was commissioned at the expense of the Grand Master Fra Manuel Pereya Pinto whose coat–of-arms appears on the base of the side columns of the altar.

The altar was examined and found to be structurally in good condition; however, it had lost its lustre and appeared dull owing to the thick layer of dust and candle soot that accumulated on the surfaces over the years. The altar was also covered with wax dripping and several layers of discoloured wax that contributed to the dull appearance of the altar and the reredos. Tests were carried out to determine a cleaning method that would be most suitable. The restoration process consisted of the removal of dirt and old waxes using the appropriate cleaning solutions and thorough rinsing with di-ionized water. The marbles were then given a protective layer of wax and buffered to the desired finish. The restoration was carried out by Mr Raymond Aquilina, in-house marble restorer with The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation.



Restoration of the Sepulchral monument of Grand Master Adrien de Wignacourt in the Chapel of the Langue of France







The sepulchral monument for Grand Master Adrien de Wignacourt (1690-1697) is located in the Chapel of the Langue of France. The tomb is an elegant yet unpretentious monument of unknown authorship, installed in the Chapel after the Grand Master's death.

The monument is carved in pure white Carrara marble with delicate red marble inlay designs. It carries a black sarcophagus over a plinth that bears an inscription describing the merits of Wignacourt. Fitted above, with the portrait of the Grand Master, is an oval gilt bronze medallion. The monument is surmounted by the coat of arms of the Grand Master above which rests an open crown flanked by war paraphernalia such as trumpets and banners of fame as symbols of justice. A garland of flowers and fruit is draped above the upper cornice which is flanked by the flame of devotion on either side.

The restoration of the monument was undertaken as part of the Foundation's programme to restore all the Grand Masters' monuments. Over the passage of time layers of wax, dust and candle soot accumulated causing the white marble carvings to appear dull and grey and tarnishing the bronze medallion. Structurally the monument was found to be in good condition.

The restoration included the removal of thick layers of aged wax and other deposits. Tests were carried out to identify the most appropriate cleaning methods. Subsequently the marbles were cleaned from all wax and grime layers. Upon completion of the cleaning process the monument was waxed, polished and buffered. The marble was then carefully cleaned and waxed by the Foundation's resident marble restorer Mr Raymond Aquilina.

The portrait of the Grand Master is a refined engraving on a gilt bronze medallion. After the removal of dirt, wax and varnishes, linseed oil was applied to revive the gilding. The medallion also showed signs of corrosion. Various mechanical and chemical methods were tested to remove the protective aged coatings. Upon formulating the most suitable method, the medallion was cleaned to reveal the fine workmanship and intricate details of the drapery texture and facial features. The final stage was the application of a protective coating of microcrystalline wax buffered to give the medallion its original lustre. The restoration of the bronze medallion was carried out by Mr James Licari, fine metals conservator.



CAPITAL PROJECTS

Carpet for the main Altar

In February 2012 the Foundation's plans to purchase a new carpet for the presbytery area of the Co-Cathedral materialised when the carpet commissioned from the *Fundación Real Fábrica de Tapices* in Madrid arrived for placement. The custom handmade carpet was designed to reflect the Baroque style of the interior of the Co-Cathedral incorporating the Maltese coat-of-arms for the first time in the Co-Cathedral and the eight-pointed cross of the Order. The specifically chosen green, gold, red, and burgundy tonalities complement those of the interior as do the elements of foliage which reflect the seventeenth century carvings of the interior walls as well as the exuberance of the baroque decorations.







The carpet, created by professional designers, specialist dyers, weavers and artists, is composed of the highest quality of materials to meet the high specifications of the Co-Cathedral. It is of the esteemed Prince Quality which allows for a high definition of the motifs in rugs of complex design. The designs are embossed with a special cut that gives a high relief to each shape and prevents blending which occurs over the passage of time. The knot is composed of 100% Spanish Merino wool whilst the warp and weft yarns are of 100% natural cotton and 100% natural jute respectively. The carpet has some forty thousand knots per square meter made according to the Turkish technique, one of the oldest weaving traditions renowned for its durability.

The *Fundación Real Fábrica de Tapices* was founded by King Philip V of Spain in 1721, in order to supply the court with rugs and tapestries. His intention was to emulate the greatness of his grand-father, Louis XIV, and the luxury of the Versailles court in the Spanish Royal Palaces. For this reason he created several royal factories where carpets, glass, porcelain and tapestries were made of the highest quality. In the 18th and 19th centuries royal court painters such as Giaquinto, Mengs and Bayeu made designs for the *Fundación Fábrica de Tapices*. The renowned Spanish artist Francisco de Goya also worked for the institution. Today the *Fundación Real Fábrica de Tapices* is considered to be one of the most important artistic industries in the world. Weavers at the *Fábrica* have been using the same weaving techniques for over 300 years and they use original looms. For nearly three centuries, numerous Government Institutions and Royal Courts around the world have entrusted the *Fundación Real Fábrica de Tapices* to decorate their most representative buildings and palaces such as The Royal Palace in Madrid and the Palace of El Prado as well as many others.



PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES







Launch of the fourth centenary celebrations since the birth of Mattia Preti

The year 2013 marks the year of the fourth centenary since the birth of the artist Mattia Preti who was born in Taverna, Calabria on the 24th February 1613. The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation opened up the celebrations for the artist on the exact day of his birth in 2012 so as to usher in planned celebrations. Works by Mattia Preti adorn the ceiling as well as many chapels of the Co-Cathedral. He also provided the Order with architectural modifications to the church and designed some of the wall carvings. St John's can be considered as a museum of Preti's work of art during his stay in Malta. The artist is buried in the nave of the church having died in Malta in 1699 some forty years after his first arrival to the island in 1659. Celebrations commenced with a Mass for the repose of the soul of Mattia Preti followed by a lecture entitled 'Update on Mattia Preti' by Giuseppe Mantella.

International Museum Day

The International Museum Day is celebrated every year on or around 18th May. In 2012 it was held on Saturday, 19th May and in the afternoon of that day The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation had the Co-Cathedral, Oratory and Museum open to visitors free of charge. A total of 512 visitors took the opportunity to visit St John's.

Notte Bianca

This year *Notte Bianca* was organised on Saturday 1st October and the Co-Cathedral, Oratory and Museum were open to the public, free of charge, from 19:00 hrs till midnight. Over 6,600 people visited the Co-Cathedral during the opening time of *Notte Bianca.*



International Conference for Wall paintings in Crypts, Grottoes and Catacombs, Quedlinburg, Germany - November, 2011.

Ms Cynthia de Giorgio, curator of St John's Co-Cathedral attended the ICOMOS International Conference for Wall paintings in Crypts, Grottoes and Catacombs in Quedlinburg, Germany, in November, 2011**.**

The conference's objective was to bring together curators who were engaged in the sustainable conservation of wall paintings in crypts. The meeting aimed at giving an impetus to an intensive international exchange of experiences on current conservation strategies and to promote the interdisciplinary exchange of mutual experiences related to the conservation of wall paintings.

Ms de Giorgio together with the conservator of the Courtauld Institute of Art gave a presentation on the restoration and conservation project of the Grand Masters' Crypt at St John's Co-Cathedral.

Conference *Cattedrali Europee- Conservazione Progammata*, Pisa - May 2012

The Curator of St John's Co-Cathedral, Ms Cynthia de Giorgio, attended the Conference *Cattedrali Europee Esperienze - Conservazione Progammata* organised by the *Opera della Primaziale Pisana* in Pisa, Italy.

The aim of the conference was to expand the mutual exchange of experiences with professionals dealing with the management and conservation of cathedrals and to create an opportunity to exchange views about the managerial models chosen by the curators present at the conference to preserve the cathedrals and the heritage sites under their jurisdiction. The conference was opened by Dott. Gian Carlo Borellini, *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Cultruali.*

Ms de Giorgio delivered a lecture on the restoration programme being implemented at St John's Co-Cathedral. The conference was attended by curators and administrators from the cathedrals of Europe.



Concerts – August 2011 till July 2012

- The Malta Hospice Movement in collaboration with The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation held a concert by The New Choral Singers on Friday 14th October 2011 to commemorate the World Hospice and Palliative Care Day.
- The Terramundi Travel Agency organized a concert of sacred music by Hayden, Rossini and Verdi on Monday 21st November 2011 with the participation of the *Collegium Musicum* Choir and Orchestra under the direction of Prof Mro Dion Buhagiar.
- On Friday 2nd December 2011 the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Mro Richard Divall presented a revival performance of *Liturgical Works for St John's* composed by Nicolò Isouard. This event was organized by the APS Bank in collaboration with The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation and the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra.
- A concert of Christmas Music and carols by the St Paul Choral Society under the direction of Mro Dr Hugo Agius Muscat accompanied by organist Dr Elisabeth Conrad was held on Friday 9th December 2011 to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the inception of the *Ghaqda Hbieb tal-Presepju* – Malta (Friends of the Crib – Malta).
- The Chorus Urbanus Productions in collaboration with Banif Bank (Malta) Plc and The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation presented the 14th edition of *Il-Kuncert tal-Milied 2011* with the participation of Chorus Urbanus and Orchestra, under the direction of Mro Dr John Galea, on Friday 16th December 2011.
- The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation hosted its annual Christmas Concert on Thursday 22nd December 2011with the participation of The *Collegium Musicum* Choir under the direction of Prof Mro Dion Buhagiar.
- On Monday 13th February 2012 the Terramundi Travel Agency organized a second concert of compositions by Hayden, Rossini and Verdi for choir and orchestra with the participation of the *Collegium Musicum* Choir under the direction of Prof Mro Dion Buhagiar.
- The annual Easter Concert was given by the *Collegium Musicum* Choir under the direction of Prof Mro Dion Buhagiar. The concert was held on Thursday 29th March 2012.



- On Friday 18th May 2012 an Organ Concert of Sicilian 16th and 17th centuries music was held in St John's Oratory by the Sicilian Organist Diego Cannizzaro. Organ music by Antonio il Verso, Giovanni Battista Fasolo, Bernardo Storace and Alessandro Scarlatti were performed.
- The Maltese Association of the Order of Malta and The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation held an orchestral Charity Concert by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Mro Michael Laus with the participation of soprano Gillian Zammit and mezzo-soprano Claire Massa. Works by Handel, Mozart and Pergolesi were performed. This concert was held on Thursday 21st June 2012 and was organized by the Charity Events Committee in aid of the philanthropic activities of the Maltese Association of the Order of Malta.



List of VIPs visiting St John's Co-Cathedral from August 2011 to July 2012

H E Ivan Gašparovič, President of the Slovak Republic, and his delegation	07-09-2011
Mr Francesco Bandarin, UNESCO Agency Assistant Director General for Culture	15-09-2011
US Senator John McCain and his delegation	28-09-2011
General Håkan Syrén – Chairman of the European Union Military Committee and his delegation	06-10-2011
H E François Zimeray, French Ambassador for Human Rights	24-10-2011
European Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos	29-10-2011
H E Mr P Burianek, Czech Ambassador for Malta	11-11-2011
HE Mr Yang Jiechi, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China	07-01-2012
H E Cardinal Mgr Joao Braz de Aviz	24-03-2012
Prof Norbert Lammert, Speaker of the German Bundestag	17-04-2012
Turkey's Minister and Chief Negotiator of EU Affairs, Egmen Bagis, and his delegation	13-04-2012
The Hon Bob Carr, Foreign Affairs Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia	20-04-2012
His Royal Highness Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester	15-04-2012
HE Dr Heinz Fischer, Federal President of Republic of Austria and Mrs Fischer and his delegation	25-04-2012
H E Ugo Leone, Ambassador of SMOM to UNESCO	17-05-2012
Hon Clesio Luiz Amorim, Minister of Defence of the Federal Republic of Brazil and his delegation	18-05-2012
HE Mr Demetris Christofias, President of THE Republic of Cyprus and his delegation	07-06-2012
HE Mr Filip Vujanović President of Montenegro, and Mrs Vujanović and his delegation	14-06-2012
HE Ms Maria Damanaki, EU Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries	14-06-2012
HE Mr Song Tao, Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister, and his delegation	20-06-2012
HE Mr Miguel Morales Leitão, Secretarey of State for EU Affairs of the Portuguese Republic, and his delegation	10-07-2012
Hon Mr Michael Link, Minister of State at Foreign Office of the Federal Republic Of Germany	25-07-2012



Main photography by Joe P. Borg, Midsea Books Ltd and The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation
Photo on page 42 by Rene Rossignaud, courtesy of APS Bank Ltd.
Printed at Gutenberg Press Ltd

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